

SAM RAYBURN HOUSE

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —
Bonham, Texas

Post-Visit Guide

Grade 4

Overview: Bringing Power to the People

Sam Rayburn, during his 48 years in the U.S. House of Representatives, played an influential part in the passing of a long list of important legislation. In this lesson, students will focus on his role in bringing electric power to rural America and reflect on the significance of electricity in their own daily lives.

Social Studies TEKS

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of active individual participation in the democratic process. The student is expected to:

(B) explain how individuals can participate voluntarily in civic affairs at state and local levels through activities such as holding public officials to their word, writing letters, and participating in historic preservation and service projects;

(D) identify the importance of historical figures and important individuals who modeled active participation in the democratic process such as Sam Houston, Barbara Jordan, Lorenzo de Zavala, Ann Richards, Sam Rayburn, Henry B. González, James A. Baker III, Wallace Jefferson, and other local individuals.

(20) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the impact of science and technology on life in Texas. The student is expected to:

(B) describe how scientific discoveries and innovations such as in aerospace, agriculture, energy, and technology have benefited individuals, businesses, and society in Texas.

(21) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States and Texas;

(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

(C) organize and interpret information in outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps.

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Materials

- Activity Pie Chart: Energy Usage
- Activity posters
- “I’m Just a Bill” Schoolhouse Rock video <https://youtu.be/FFroMQIKiag>

Vocabulary

- **rural:** of or relating to the country and the people who live there instead of the city.
- **urban:** of or relating to cities and the people who live in them.
- **electrification:** to supply an area, community, city with electric power.
- **cooperative:** an organization jointly owned by people and operated by them so that it is mutually beneficial; they typically are able to supply services that would not be affordable without their joint efforts (such as electricity or food).
- **kerosene:** also called paraffin or lamp oil, a flammable liquid commonly used as a fuel.

Activity: Electric Lives

20 minutes

Context: Between the 1880s and 1920s, almost all of urban America benefited from electricity. However, by the 1930s, only 10% of rural Americans had access to electricity. Living in the small Texas town of Bonham, Sam Rayburn likely understood the experience of limited electricity better than many of his fellow representatives.

Life without electricity for rural America was very difficult. Lighting after dark was provided by kerosene lamps, stoves were wood burning, ironing was done with heavy metal irons heated on wood stoves, water had to be pumped from wells with windmills or by hand, any dish or clothes washing was done by hand over large tubs of hot water heated over wooden fires or on the stove, and bathing occurred only once a week with warm water heated over fires or a wood burning stove. Additionally, rural Americans did not have the benefit of up-to-date radio news broadcasts in their homes.

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Why was rural America without electricity for so long? Electric companies argued that building poles and lines for people living in the country would cost more for the companies than they would gain from electricity sales to those new customers.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt saw the gap between rural and urban American daily life and created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935 to increase access to electricity throughout America. That same year, Sam Rayburn paid the electric company to build electric poles and run electric lines to his home. In 1936, Rayburn co-sponsored a bill that would become the Rural Electrification Act. The Act provided government loans to groups of rural Americans who banded together into cooperatives. These cooperatives worked together with REA crews to build electric poles and run lines to their rural areas. Over time, the cooperatives were able to pay back their loans to the U.S. government. By 1950, 90% of rural America had electricity. Through the years, the Rural Electrification Act was amended to include access to other utilities including telephone and broadband internet services. Many REA cooperatives still exist today.

Ask students to reflect on their visit to the Sam Rayburn House State Historic Site and complete the “Learned” column of their K-W-L charts during the first five minutes of class.

Discuss some of the students’ most memorable experiences from the site visit. Were questions from their “Want to Know” column answered? What did they learn?

Divide the class into small groups. Have groups brainstorm all the ways that they use electricity or energy in their lives. Share responses to create a classroom list. Responses might include:

- air conditioning and heating
- cooking with electric stoves, microwaves and other appliances
- refrigerators and freezers
- clothes washers and dryers
- dishwashers
- water heating for baths and showers
- electronic appliances like televisions, computers and phone charging
- indoor and outdoor lighting
- public street lights
- business and store lighting, air conditioning/heating, computers and payment systems
- school lighting, air conditioning/heating, and computers

Ask students to imagine life without these electric conveniences.

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Instruct students to think of the electrical convenience they use most in their daily lives. Have them draw three columns on a sheet of paper with the headers of “Pro,” “Con,” and “Future. In the Pro column, have them list the good points of having that convenience in their lives. In the Con column, tell them to list the drawbacks or problems in relying on that convenience. In the Future column, have them predict new ways people might use that convenience. Share responses.

Activity: Bill to Law

30 minutes

View “Schoolhouse Rock: America – I’m Just a Bill Music Video” on YouTube as made available by Disney Educational Productions. <https://youtu.be/FFroMQiKiag>

Act out the process of how a bill is moved into law:

- introduction of a bill through the House and Senate,
- debate and amendments, and
- veto or signing into law by the President.

Select someone to be the “president” and someone to be the “bill.” Divide the class into two groups: a larger group for the House of Representatives and a smaller group for the Senate. Introduce the bill in both the House and Senate. Congressmen may suggest changes to the bill by asking the student to remove a shoe, stand on one leg, etc. Once the bill is passed by both the House and Senate, it moves to the president to either be signed into law or vetoed.

Activity: Powerful Posters

15 minutes

Display and discuss **Rural Electrification Administration (REA) posters**. As a class, identify main idea that the poster artist, Lester Beall, created. How did electricity simplify or improve the task depicted in the poster? What elements in the poster convey that message?

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SS/ELA Extension Activity: Dear Mr. Sam

ELA TEKS

(18) Writing/Expository and Procedural Texts. Students write expository and procedural or work-related texts to communicate ideas and information to specific audiences for specific purposes. Students are expected to:

(A) create brief compositions that:

- (i) establish a central idea in a topic sentence;
- (ii) include supporting sentences with simple facts, details, and explanations; and
- (iii) contain a concluding statement.

(B) write letters whose language is tailored to the audience and purpose (e.g., a thank you note to a friend) and that use appropriate conventions (e.g., date, salutation, closing).

(19) Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write persuasive essays for appropriate audiences that establish a position and use supporting details.

Have students imagine that they are living in rural Texas in the early 1930s. They are to write a letter to their U.S. Congressman Mr. Sam Rayburn identifying their daily life hardships without electricity and persuading Mr. Rayburn to support legislation to help bring electricity to rural America. Their letter must include supporting details and facts learned from these lessons, their visit to the Sam Rayburn House, and outside research about daily life in the 1930s.

Assessment

Evaluate students' final KWL charts and poster investigation participation for completeness and understanding.

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A final word from Mr. Sam

Citation: United States. Congress. (87th, 1st session : 1961). House. *The Leadership of Speaker Sam Rayburn*, book, 1961; Washington D.C. University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu
texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht14386/m1/7/?q=sam%20rayburn%20letter (Accessed June 23, 2018).

“I know our country is great—men and women have made it great. I have the faith to believe that the youth of this land and the great schools, the high schools, colleges, and universities of this land have within them the elements of good citizenship so that they will in the years to come preserve, protect, defend, and perpetuate the institutions of this, the mightiest, the freest, and the best government that has ever blessed human beings at any time or in any clime.”

-- Sam Rayburn

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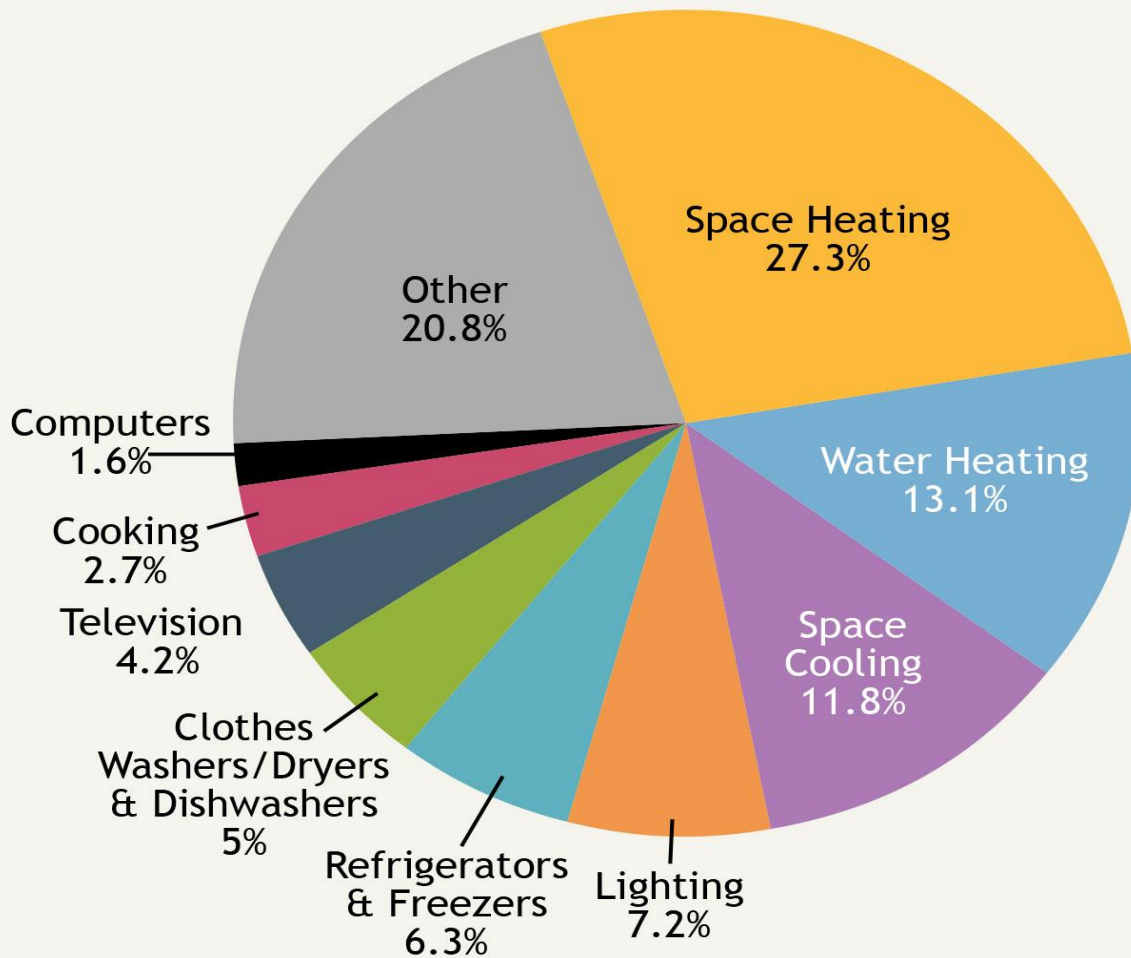
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Activity Pie Chart

Energy Usage in the U.S. Residential Sector in 2015



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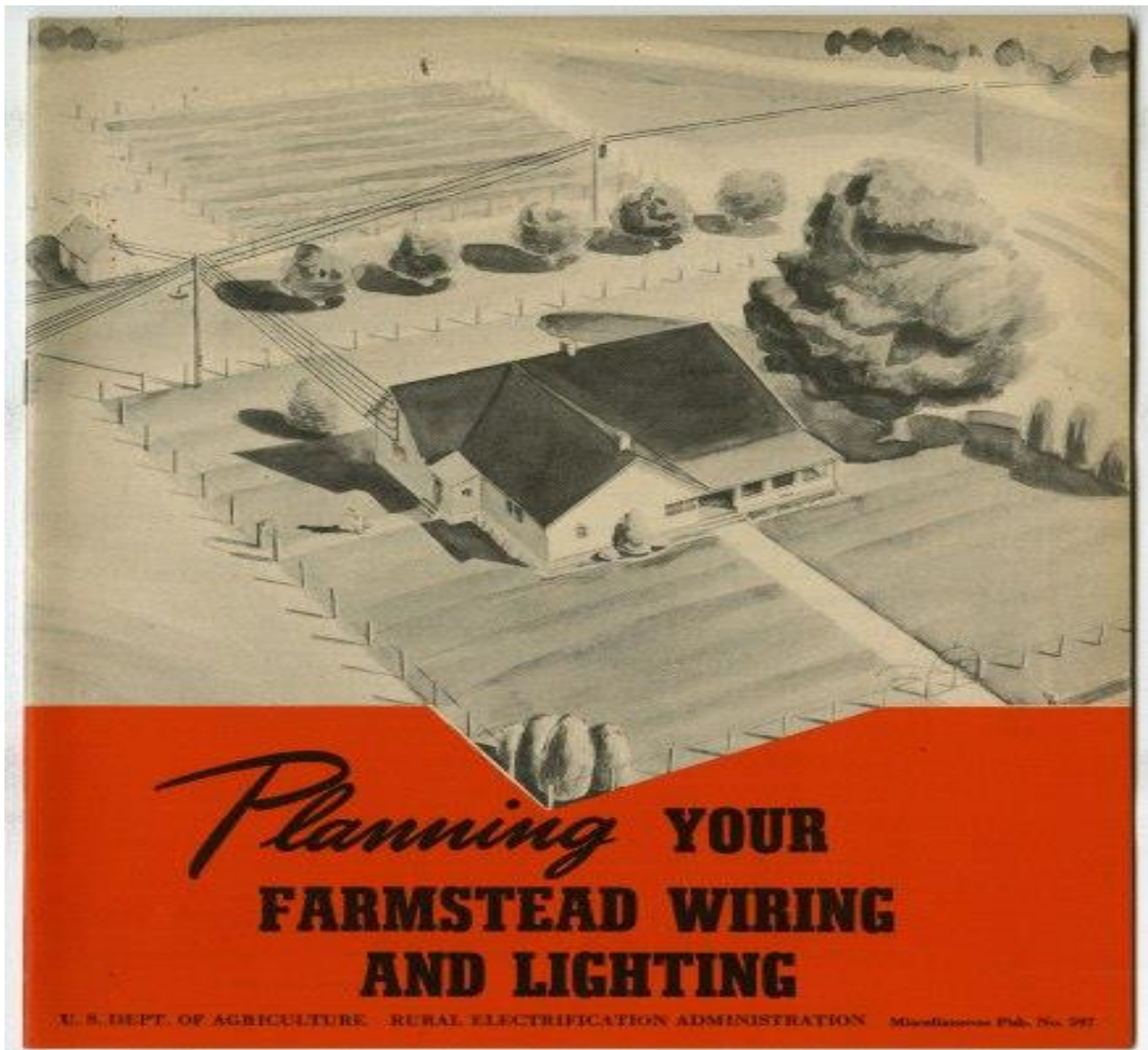
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Activity: Powerful Poster 1

Citation: Front cover of pamphlet titled “planning Your Farmstead Wiring and Lighting.” 1940-1951. Louisan E. Mamer Rural Electrification Administration Papers, 1927-2002, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/rural-electrification> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



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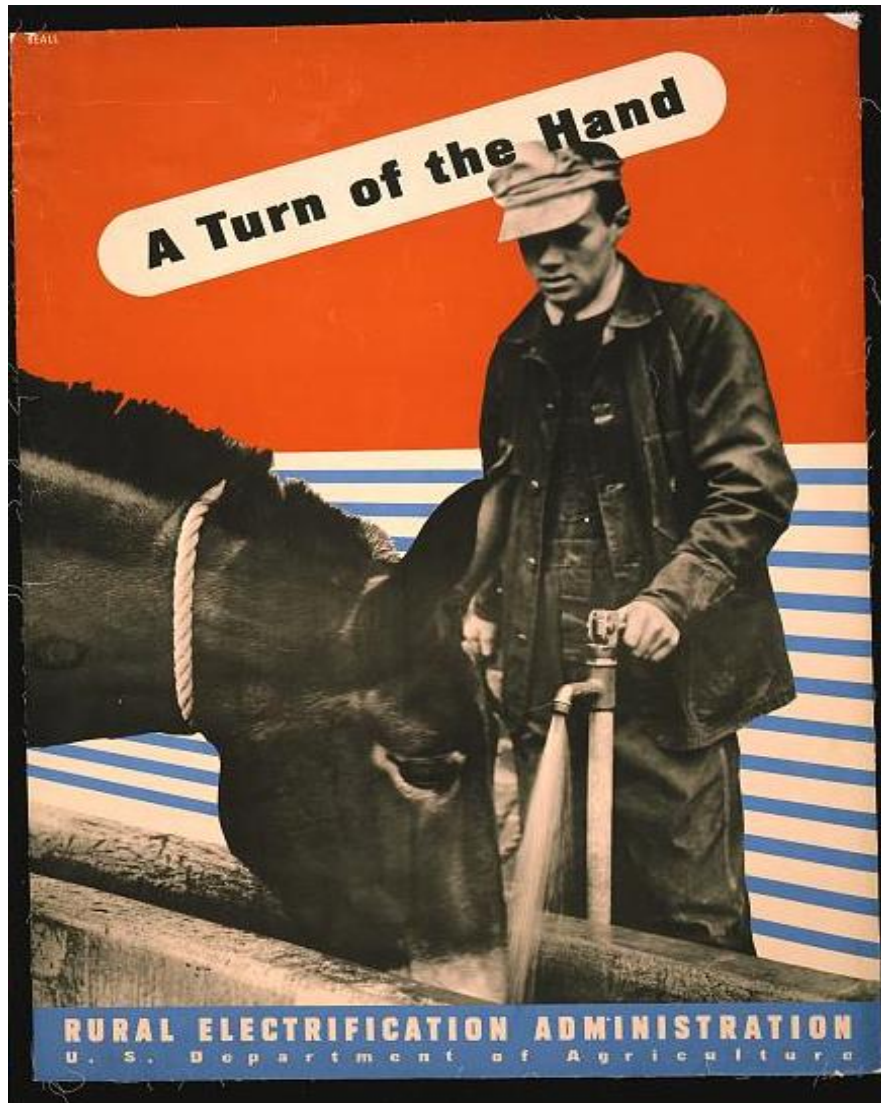
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Activity: Powerful Poster 2

Citation: Beall, Lester, Artist. *A turn of the hand* Rural Electrification Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture // Beall, United States. [193] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010650603/> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



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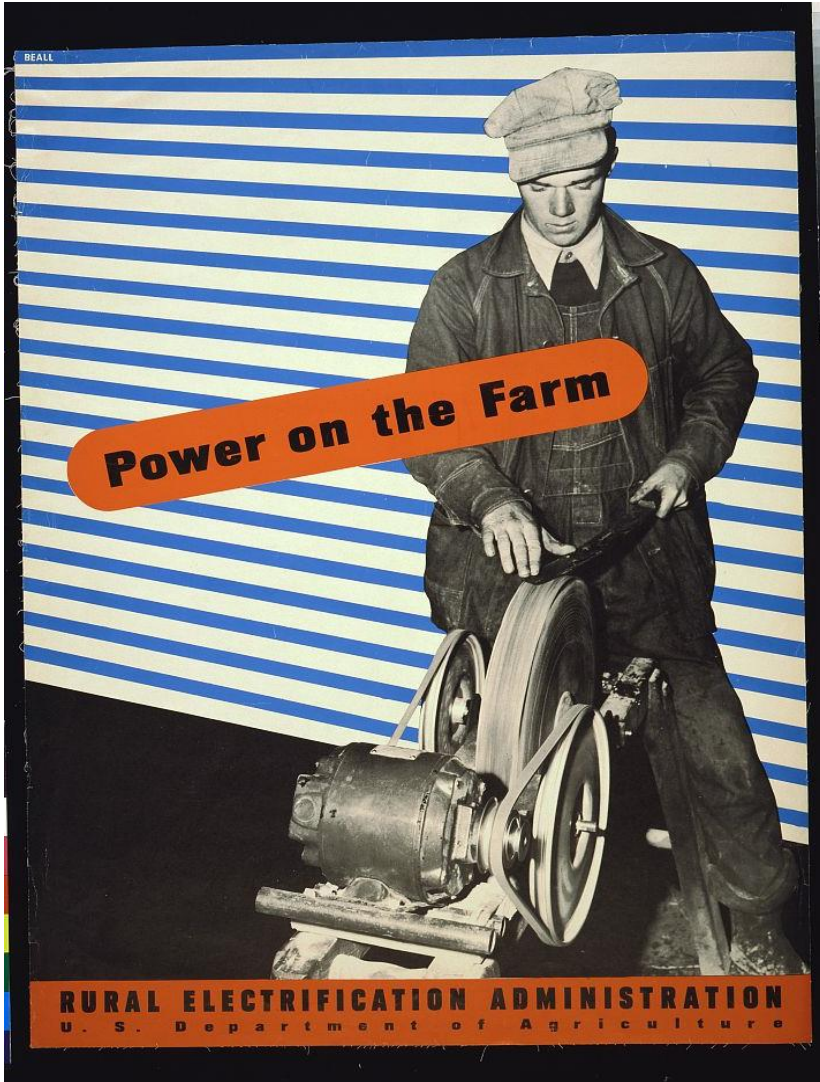
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Activity: Powerful Poster 3

Citation: Beall, Lester, Artist. *Power on the farm* Rural Electrification Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture. United States, 1940. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010650606/> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



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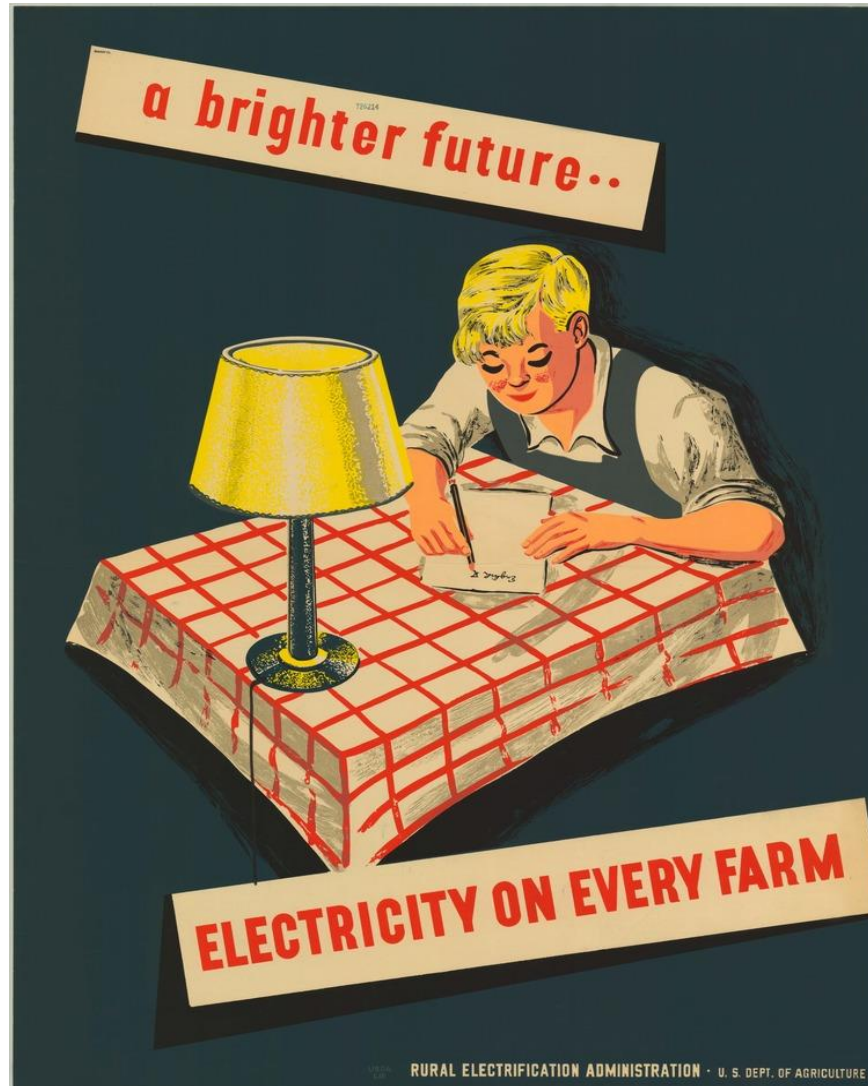
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Activity: Powerful Poster 4

Citation: Rural Electrification Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture. *A brighter future... Electricity on Every Farm*. Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/speccoll/items/show/214> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



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Activity: Powerful Poster 5

Citation: Rural Electrification Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture. *New Member-New Owner. REA Co-ops Are Member-Owned and Controlled*. Special Collections, USDA National Agricultural Library. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/speccoll/items/show/215> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



Activity: Powerful Poster 6

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Citation: Beall, Lester, Artist, and Funder/Sponsor United States Rural Electrification Administration. *Rural Electrification Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture / Beall*. [193] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/91481634/> (Accessed June 26, 2018).



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